



December 17, 2020

Dear Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Vice Chair Girod, Co-Vice Chair Drazen and Members of the Joint Interim Committee On The First Special Session of 2020,

My name is Olivia Asato, and I serve as a Public Policy Associate at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO is an association comprising of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, connecting hundreds of thousands of diverse members of the faith community all across the state. We work to improve the lives of Oregonians through housing and other direct service programs, dialogue and advocacy.

EMO strongly supports proposed Legislative Concept 18 for the December 21st special session that will keep Oregonians in stable housing and prevent them from becoming houseless.

EMO's support for extending protections to keep Oregonians in stable housing stems not only from our member's shared commitment to justice, but also our experience operating 4 housing-related programs for marginalized communities. This includes services to houseless youth through our Second Home program; housing support to survivors of domestic violence who are clients at our Russian Oregon Social Services program, affordable housing to low-income residents through Metro HomeShare, and housing to recently arrived refugees starting new lives through our SOAR Refugee Resettlement program.

As a community of faith, we believe that our state has a moral imperative to keep our neighbors in housing by passing Legislative Concept 18.

Now more than ever, we must also prevent houselessness to combat the injustice of systemic racism in Oregon's housing market. The recent police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and other Black Americans serve as horrific reminders of the deeply ingrained racial inequities in our country's social institutions. Racism touches every facet of American life, including the housing market. As a result, Black Oregonians are:

- 2 times more likely than average to live in poverty.¹
- 2 times more likely than white people to rent their housing instead of owning it.²
- 3 times more likely than white people to experience houselessness.³

EMO especially supports residential eviction and foreclosure moratoriums as mechanisms for preventing youth houselessness.

As leading advocates for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth (UHY), EMO knows that the best way to prevent youth houselessness is to keep children in stable housing with their families. Nationally, 47% of UHY first experience houselessness with their families.⁴

¹ <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/201711/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/150812>

² <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/201711/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/150812>

³ <https://oregoncf.org/assets/PDFs-and-Docs/PDFs/OregonHomelessness.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.americaspromise.org/report/hidden-plain-sight>

Oregon already faced a youth houselessness crisis before the pandemic. Our state is tied for the *highest rate of houseless youth* and 1 in 6 of these youth are unaccompanied youth navigating houselessness without being in the presence of a parent or guardian.

Oregon's UHY resemble our foster youth but have far less services devoted to their needs. UHY are disproportionately survivors of physical and sexual abuse (up to 50% nationally), LGBTQIA+ youth (up to 40%), and former foster care youth (33%). Many also experience systemic racism, and Black youth are 3 times more likely than whites to experience youth houselessness in the U.S. Nationally, 36% of UHY are Black and 52% are youth of color.⁵

On behalf of our clients and in embrace of our responsibility for one another during this global health crisis, we thank the Legislature for considering these requests.

Sincerely,

Olivia Asato
Public Policy Associate
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/962207/share-unaccompanied-homeless-youth-us-race/>